





To the Author's Compliment

BISHOP HEDLEY

AND

DOM U. BERLIÈRE

ON THE

HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH
BENEDICTINES.

A LETTER TO A FRIEND

BY

EDMUND BISHOP.

TO THE READER.

THE following letter explains its origin and object. It is printed for private circulation, because such discussions, even though only treating of facts, are, usually, best reserved for those who may be supposed to be interested.

To some readers I may seem in a measure to dim past glories ; but, on the other hand, one of the chief claims of the Benedictines to respect has been their ready preference for the honest and simple truth of fact, even when it might be, in itself, unpleasant. I have also dwelt (in terms, as I think, yet more moderate than the facts warrant) on a feature not brought hitherto into the prominence which it deserves, tending to the singular honour of the Benedictines of our nation. But I am deeply sensible that the recalling of such memories of the past is good just in the measure in which it is useful, viz., as an incentive in present effort, an encouragement in the midst of the particular difficulties and needs of our own day, and a reminder how *noblesse oblige*.

E. B.

December 29, 1897.

PART I.

November 26, 1897.

MY DEAR —,

When you came to say good-bye to me on Saturday morning last, I could not help expressing wonder how Bishop Hedley could have composed and delivered a discourse of the character of that printed in the *Tablet* of the same day's date which I was then reading. Whilst so many of the statements it contains relative to the history of the English Benedictines in earlier and later mediæval times run counter to recorded fact, they seemed on the face of them to have a bearing on the description given of the English Benedictine congregation of to-day which introduces them, and to read like *pièces justificatives* for that description. I was the more struck by this inasmuch as I had just been occupied with some bulky volumes at which a deceased antiquary had laboured in a case somewhat similar. Some friends of his, eager in the promotion of a scheme for modern cathedral chapters, had, looking at the past through modern spectacles, conceived an imaginary history for this institute in the Middle Ages. The late Henry Bradshaw (the antiquary in question) intervened with a plea to this effect: "By all means carry out your scheme, *but don't base it on false history*"; and the bulky volumes in question are an attempt to bring out the true history based on real and documentary evidence.

His words are so apposite that I quote them here:—

"It is distressing to me (he says, in writing to one of his friends) to see a really admirable proposal brought forward and made to rest on

a thoroughly unsound and unhistoric basis. . . . If the English Church has life, and the need of such an organisation is felt in it, surely the need can be met without the discredit of what is neither more nor less than a display of unreal antiquarianism. If antiquities are worth studying at all they must be studied intelligently, and, above all, they must be allowed to tell their own story. Those who look upon them as dead heaps from which to pick and choose just what suits their purpose, while they ignore the surroundings, will surely find the Nemesis for which they ought to be prepared. The 'intelligent study of antiquities' is one of the most serious duties of my calling in life. If you ask me what I have to say on this matter I am bound to speak out, and to give you in reply what I honestly believe to be the truth."

You too seemed interested in what I said, and asked me to note down on paper the printed statements which I had called baseless or not in accordance with fact. I should have hesitated to comply with such a request were it made by one who knows me less well. You at least know how I sympathise with missionary work, how rejoiced I am in its success, and how much it interests me, not merely in the general but in detail. You know, as I had occasion again to repeat quite recently in a conversation we had together, how I feel that *all* the work, in its different kinds, in which the various members of a community may be engaged—be it in ministering to a poor flock like yours in ———, or be it at Benet House, Cambridge; whether at Great Ormond Street, or in the school or the monastery at Downside—is all *one*; and few things pain me more than any attempt to pit one sort of work against another, to depreciate one in order to glorify another, to magnify the merit of one at the expense of another. Whilst it is to be desired that each man's soul be in the particular work in which he is engaged, to be unable to sympathise with a brother's work because it is different in character, seems to me to indicate a spirit far removed from, indeed, irreconcilable with, that of the Benedictine. You knowing this, I so far readily respond to your request.

There is, however, one thing that makes me hesitate. The words printed in the *Tablet* proceed from a bishop and are delivered in a sermon. Both these facts are a strong claim on a Catholic to refrain from all criticism. On the other hand is this consideration. Historical facts have on their side, too, a real and positive claim to respect as truth, which circumstances cannot lessen. And when this ground of history is ventured on, the inviolability of the sacred pulpit—the *Chaire de vérité* as our French neighbours so well have it—does not reach beyond the point where its utterances begin to deflect from the verity of fact, and the measure in which these utterances may depart (of course unwittingly) from that truth of fact, is the measure in which they may fall within the scope of criticism.

As I am to deal with statements as of fact, I may, then, in what I have to say dismiss from mind place, orator, audience, circumstances ; and take up the various passages of this discourse that fall under review as so much matter printed in the columns of a public paper. The simplest and most convenient plan will be to take these passages group by group, and comment on each as it turns up. This I now proceed to do.

(i.)

“What did St. Gregory the Great do, as Sovereign Pontiff, when he sent these monks to England? In reality he founded, not a new Order, but certainly a new congregation. Their habit and their rule were those of St. Benedict, but a task was laid upon their shoulders far heavier than anything which had hitherto been symbolised by the monastic scapular which they wore. . . . Now the combination of monk and missionary became the very note and character of a monastic institute.

“The houses [of Benedictine monks] which were scattered all over England [in the seventh and eighth centuries]—from Canterbury all the way up the east coast to Tynemouth and Holy Island, from Canterbury all along our southern shores to Malmesbury and the

hills of Cornwall, from Glastonbury all along the Severn valley to Tewkesbury and far into the Marches of Wales, over Yorkshire and the old Strathclyde—these houses, great and small, sheltered men who wore St. Benedict's habit, but who had work and duties which other Benedictines did not attempt, and a position which they did not claim."

[And what the work and duty of those who entered these monasteries was, is thus explained : it] "was not to settle . . . as monks had settled at Rome, or Lerins, or Glanfeuil, but to add on to their cloister and their choir a parish church and a parish school—to place their peace and their recollection at the mercy of the entire population—to be prepared to sally out, after morning meditations to the streets, the markets, the council chamber, and the cross roads, there to spend themselves until the vesper hour in winning souls to Jesus Christ."

On this whole complex of statements I have a series of remarks to make which, though divided into paragraphs proceeding in order from the more general to the more particular, must not be detached one from another, but must be read as one whole.

(a) If St. Augustine's monks and their successors in England in the seventh and eighth centuries were designed to have, and had, a special and particular character and special work and duties differentiating the "new congregation" in its nature from other Benedictines, it is singular not only that there should be no record of this, but that no consciousness even of any such thing should betray itself in any document or writing proceeding from those times. In other words, no direct or positive testimony can be adduced in support of the statement ; and the only evidence that can be available in proof of it must be indirect, and of the nature of a deduction from facts.

(b) To facts let us turn. And here the authentic and original records of monastic history of the sixth seventh and eighth centuries show among monks generally a great missionary activity, when they found themselves in the same circumstances as those of the first century of

the Benedictine institute in England. Of course in ancient and established Christianities, like those of Rome and Southern Gaul, there was no place for the missionary work of monks. The comparison instituted between Rome or Lerins and England is on the face of it inadmissible, for an essential element of a just comparison is similarity of circumstances. On turning to the north and east of Gaul in the sixth and seventh centuries, where the circumstances were much the same, we find the country largely evangelised by monks, and the monks there doing what they did in England, preaching the gospel to the pagan. To represent this work of evangelisation as a special characteristic of the English Benedictine, marking him off as by a peculiar note from other monks and Benedictines, is only to ignore what was done in other countries. So soon as the Benedictine institute can be authentically shown to have made good its footing in Gaul, it appears (where the surroundings are the same) in as missionary a guise as authentic record represents it to be in England.

What really enforces the idea in people's minds of a special missionary bent of English monachism is the conversion of Germany to a considerable extent by the labours of English monk-missionaries in the eighth century, and their success in establishing an organised church in those regions on a firm and enduring basis. In fact, St. Boniface combines in his single personality the claims to veneration of an Augustine, an Aidan, and a Theodore. But this is work of *foreign* missions, and is not what is aimed at in the passages of the discourse quoted above.

(c) To come to England then. The picture sketched in outline of Benedictine houses scattered all over the land in the seventh and eighth centuries is an exaggerated one. When we come to pass from impressions to enquire what

we can really know from authentic sources, it is found that the monasteries which can be identified as those of Benedictine monks are not very numerous, but they are certainly remarkable for their importance and vast influence. A not inconsiderable proportion of the monasteries whose names have survived were founded under Irish influence and not Benedictine. As to the life which was led therein, and the duties of their inhabitants, we can do little more than conjecture, except on one point, which seems tolerably certain. From the tendency in the Irish character to wander, the example of their widespread work abroad, and such glimpses as we get from Bede's History and the Lives of St. Cuthbert, it may be gathered that these Irish monks in England, though not Benedictines, realised on their own account¹ the "combination of monk and missionary" to a degree which warrants us in saying that it was "the very note and character of their monastic institute." Besides these Irish houses, the number of monasteries of clerics leading more or less of the common life has to be taken into account, and that number seems an appreciable one also.

(d) Turning now to the English monasteries of the seventh and eighth centuries, which can be known or reasonably conjectured to be Benedictine, there are some of which there exist particular records sufficient to tell us what was the work and duty of the monks in them. With the exception (perhaps) of Lindisfarne, so far as these records go they are remarkable rather for showing an absence of notice of such work and duties as is stated in

¹ This if predominantly was of course not invariably the case, as is shown by the little Irish monastery found by St. Wilfrid in Sussex; or by Hean's monastery at Abingdon, if the account given of this latter could be relied on.

the columns of the *Tablet* to have specially characterised the Benedictines.

(e) Finally, as to the idea of Benedictines erecting throughout the land parish churches (I say nothing of parish schools), or as forming any considerable part of the pastoral clergy when Theodore's scheme for the organisation of the English church came into working order (say from the year 700), there is no trace of such a state of things in the original records, and the picture drawn in the concluding passage quoted above has no documentary warrant. I say this the more confidently inasmuch as a few years ago I perused, pen in hand, the original documents of the first two centuries of the English Church for the special purpose of gathering what is on record as to the Anglo-Saxon priest and the pastoral functions. In the course of the past week I have gone rapidly through these documents again, expressly from the point of view developed in the discourse, to see whether they can be reasonably read in this sense. The impression derived is just the same as before. When once the great missionary epoch is past when every man of good will put his hand to the work where and how he could, there is no positive evidence and testimony that I can find to show that the Benedictine monks took a share in the pastoral work and acted as parish priests. The records reveal the progressive establishment of a Church on normal lines in which, after the monks had done so large a measure of pioneer work (attracting to themselves, however, both then and later, the most considerable proportion of the most able men), the clergy take their usual place in the ecclesiastical organisation and Church system; but the considerable development of the common life among the clergy at so early a date is remarkable, a feature apprehended but unduly exaggerated by Lingard, and exposed with admir-

able insight by Kemble (*The Saxons in England*, vol. ii., the first half of chapter ix.).

(f) I have spoken hitherto (except in the last two lines) of "authentic records," and the "sources." Of course for the run of persons in these busy times modern books must suffice. After going through the sources I too went again to familiar modern books, and found what seemed to be not uninformative in the present matter. The case is somewhat complex ; but here is a summary, which I hope will be found to the point.

In Montalembert's *Monks of the West* there are three principal passages bearing on the pastoral work of Anglo-Saxon monks and the rise of parishes.¹

These passages are written under the influence of Lingard's chapter iv. of vol. i, "Anglo-Saxon Clergy," and chapter ix. of vol. 2 of Kemble's *Saxons in England*, "The Clergy and the Monks."

The first two passages are evidently written with considerable care and with nice choice of words. And there is a reason for this. Montalembert wishes to enforce the view that the conversion of England was *exclusively* the work of monks (a statement which he repeats again and again in various forms), and that the clergy had no share in it. That is not the view of his two principal guides at these places ; Lingard (as one-sided as Montalembert) practically denies, indeed, to the Benedictines a share in this active missionary work, seeing instead of them clerics leading the common life.

In Montalembert's third passage, which occurs in a chapter of generalisation, "The Social and Political Influence of the Monks," he breaks the bounds of prudence and gives course to what can only be called, I

¹ In the original French edition, iii., 421-422 ; iv., 214-215 ; v., 152-154. In the English translation (Nimmo's edition), iii., 234-236, 431-432 ; iv., 307-309.

think, the heat of rhetoric. For this picture he quotes Lingard, and any one who compares the text of the two writers will see clearly enough that he does, in fact, follow the Englishman—BUT, silently and without warning, by a few magic strokes of the facile Gallic pen, he transforms Lingard's clerics, "all my pretty ones," into monks "exclusively." This last single word is the full expression of Montalembert's error of presentment.

But this is not all. I have said that in the two first passages, under the evident influence of his forerunners, Montalembert attends to his phrasing with care. The English translator, unaware of the niceties of the case, and carried away perhaps by the general tendency of his author, effaces all this; for instance, where Montalembert has "la vie commune," the translator says "the monastic life," and so on. If the reader who trusts to Montalembert only is at a disadvantage, the reader of the English translation only is at a still further disadvantage.

But there is another step to make yet. The late venerable Abate Tosti in his *St. Benedict*, in order to describe the work of the English Benedictines in their first century in England, chooses (as is perhaps natural in "An Historical Discourse") the third and most rhetorical passage (making, too, poor Kemble responsible for it, who was wholly innocent). In it occurs a sentence relating to the pastoral work performed by the English monks. This sentence I find in four distinct forms, which I here give.

<i>Montalembert's own</i> (v. 154).	<i>The English Translator's</i> <i>Montalembert</i> iv. 308).	<i>Tosti's</i> <i>Montalembert</i> . (p. 306).	<i>Canon Woods'</i> <i>Tosti</i> (p. 210).
Pendant un siècle au moins ils (the monks) tinrent exclusivement lieu de clergé sé- culier ou paroiss- ial.	For a century at least they held the place of the secular or paro- chial clergy.	Nel corso di un secolo essi ten- nero le veci del clero secolare e paro- chiale.	In the course of a century they occupied the place of the secular and parochial clergy.

The matter does not stop even here, for we find Montalembert's "missionaries," who went forth from their "monasteries" as "centres" "to the rural stations in order to baptize, preach, and celebrate all the rites of worship, and returned to them in order to refresh themselves in study and prayer" (Canon Woods' translation of Tosti, p. 210), become in the discourse in the *Tablet*, monks whose business "was not to settle, but to add on to their cloister and their choir a parish church and a parish school—to place their peace and their recollection at the mercy of the entire population—to be prepared to sally out after morning meditations to the streets, the markets, the council chamber and the cross roads, there to spend themselves until the vesper hour."

(ii.)

"Yet this was what happened (so continues the discourse). We have not only St. Gregory's actions, but his very words (in Ven. Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, book i., ch. 27). ¹ He said to St. Augustine: 'You must by all means continue to live the monastic life in which you have been brought up; in the church of the English you must live, with your clergy, the common life' (that is, the *vita communis*—the technical term for the life of religious poverty and the absence of private property).² Thus the distinguishing character of the English Benedictine congregation was clearly this: a cloistered life combined with missionary work; missionary work which should allow the monastic life to be practised, in its substance and essentials, unimpaired."

^{1 2} In the current number of the *Ampleforth Journal* this passage appears in the following form. The change thus made involves no change whatever in the remarks already written on the original text printed in the *Tablet*:—"He prescribes to St. Augustine, bishop as he is, a 'common life' with his clergy. 'Since your fraternity, he says, 'hath been brought up in the monastic rule, and ought not, therefore, to live separate from your clergy, you must establish in that church of the English, which by God's grace hath lately been brought to the faith, the mode of life followed by our fathers in the days of the early church when no one called anything which they possessed his own, but all things were in common.'"

On turning to the "very words" of St. Gregory from which the distinguishing character of the English Benedictine congregation is thus deduced, it is found that they have no reference to monks, and refer to St. Augustine in his special character of bishop. Several writers of repute have used the very document here quoted as an argument to prove that St. Augustine and his companions were not monks but clerics. And indeed, if it does really relate to the persons who were sent by St. Gregory and who accompanied St. Augustine from Rome, the conclusion is inevitable that they were not Benedictines at all. Though the passage is rather long, the circumstances under which it comes into discussion make it of sufficient interest to be given here in full.

"The first question of the blessed Augustine, bishop of the church of the Kentish men. Of bishops, how they should live (*conversetur*) with their clergy; and how many parts the oblations made by the faithful to the altar should be divided into; and how the bishop should conduct himself (*agere*) in his church?

"Gregory, the Pope of the city of Rome, answered: [this] Holy Scripture (which no doubt you know well) declares; and especially the letters of St. Paul to Timothy, in which he was careful to instruct him how to live in the house of God. But it is the custom of the Apostolic See to give it in charge to [newly] ordained bishops to divide everything received into four parts—one, that is, for the bishop and his household for hospitality and receiving guests; another for the clergy; the third for the poor; the fourth for repairing churches.¹

"But because you, [as one] trained in monastic rules, ought not to live separately from your clerics, you ought to establish in the church of the English, which, *Deo auctore*, has but just now been brought to the faith, that kind of life which existed among our fathers at the beginning of the nascent Church, none of whom called anything which they possessed their own, but all things were common among them.²

"But if there are any clerics not in sacred orders³ who cannot

¹ In *Liber diurnus*, ed. de Rozière, No. vi., p. 27.

² Acts iv. 32.

³ At this date in Rome all below the order of deacon were considered as not in sacred orders.

contain, they should marry and receive their *stipendia* apart.¹ For we know it is written of the same fathers of whom we made mention above, that ‘*dividebatur singulis prout cuique opus erat.*’² On the score of their *stipendium* consideration must be taken and provision made for keeping them under ecclesiastical rule,³ that they live a good life, be sedulous in psalmody, and, *Deo auctore*, keep heart and tongue and body from all unlawful things.

“But as regards those leading the common life, what need is there for us to speak of assignment of portions, or giving hospitality, or performing works of mercy; since all that is superfluous is to be expended in pious and religious uses; our Lord, the Master of all, teaching, ‘*Quod superest date eleemosynam et ecce omnia munda sunt vobis.*’”

The passage is indeed long; but since it is appealed to, it is only proper that you should be put in possession of the means of seeing for yourself what is the value of the appeal. You will observe in the present case that in proof that St. Gregory founded “a new congregation” with “work and duties which other Benedictines did not attempt,” and a “monastic institute” of which “the combination of monk and missionary” should be “the very note and character,” and, indeed, “the distinguishing character,” we are referred to a document which deals, not with the monk companions of St. Augustine, but with what we now call “the secular clergy.”

(iii.)

I pass over what is said as to the monastic revival of the tenth century to come to the more precise statements concerning the later time of “the ages of faith,” from the twelfth to the sixteenth century.

¹ “*exterius*” = living in their own dwelling, outside the common house.

² Acts iv. 35.

³ “*De eorum quoque stipendio cogitandum atque providendum est, et sub ecclesiastica regula sunt tenendi, ut*” &c.

(iv.)

On this subject the discourse proceeds as follows. I throw the several statements into paragraph form for the sake of clearness.

"I must pass briefly over the story of the English Benedictines during the ages of faith. . . . It is not too much to say that nothing greater, finer, or more powerful has ever been known in any age of the Church's history outside the work of the Holy See and the Episcopate.

"But let it never be lost sight of that all through that period of power and greatness the English Benedictines never ceased to make themselves felt in the hierarchy and to labour in the cure of souls.

"They formed nine of the cathedral chapters of the country.

"Their abbeys and priories were each of them the centre of a little circle of parishes and stations, in all of which they had built the public churches, and were either themselves furnishing the priests or were maintaining them. . . .

"Thus the populations of the Severn valley were cared for by Benedictine pastors, inmates of such cloisters as Gloucester, Worcester, Evesham, Malvern and Tewkesbury.

"Thus, in the far north, a small house like Tynemouth had ten or a dozen ['numerous'—*Ampleforth Journal*] stations, technically called 'cells,' but really excellently built churches with presbyteries, in which the monks, two at a time ['resided'—*Ampleforth Journal*], celebrated the holy sacrifice, preached, and administered the sacraments for the benefit of the flock."

I do not pursue the reflections which follow, as they can have place or reason only on the condition that the foregoing statements really represent the facts. But, to complete the picture the following passage must not be omitted.

"Many of the monks had no cure of souls and never left their enclosure ; but of those who carried on the work of St. Augustine," &c., &c.

The whole of the foregoing is so curiously wrong that I feel a difficulty how to address myself to these categorical statements and at the same time avoid offence. But facts are facts, and the simplest and most straightforward way is doubtless the best.

We have now reached times—the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries—when documents abound, and the difficulty is, in the matter under consideration, how to go wrong. There are episcopal registers, records of ordinations, lists of incumbents, chronicles and documents of all kinds affording abundant subsidiary light. Whether the fact be regrettable or not, it is the fact that the English Benedictines in the times designated as “the ages of faith,” did *not* take a share in parochial or pastoral work; the “abbey and priories” did *not* “furnish the priests,” wholly or in part, from their own ranks to “the little circle of parishes and stations about them”; “the populations of the Severn valley were” *not* “cared for by Benedictine pastors, inmates of such cloisters as Gloucester,” &c.; the house of Tynemouth (which, though only a cell of St. Alban’s, was, by the way, not “small,” but had a church 300 feet in length, and estimated its revenues early in the sixteenth century at over £700 a year, an income larger than that of most of the “greater monasteries”) had *not* “ten or a dozen stations technically called ‘cells,’” nor in the “really excellently built churches with presbyteries” did its “monks, two at a time, celebrate the holy sacrifice,” &c.

So far from the English Benedictines serving parishes in these centuries, the difficulty is to find a case in which a Benedictine served a parish or a chapelry. Even in the case of cells, whether with many inmates or with few, and even where the parish altar was in the conventual church, a secular priest was appointed to the cure of souls, and he served the parish altar. A monk of Winchester St. Swithin’s did serve a small chapel near the city; there was, I believe, a similar case at Norwich; such an instance was in one case certainly complained of at a visitation as being wrong. I should be obliged to anyone who, with

local knowledge, could supply additional and authentic cases. It might be possible to raise the number to half a dozen some day or other, or just as likely that it may not be possible to do even that.

It may be interesting to note that the picture drawn in this section of the discourse exactly describes what was the condition, practice, and status of the Canons Regular, whether black or white. Bishop Hedley has by some ill fortune *pris justement le change*, as the French say, and has attributed to the English Benedictines what precisely and specially does not apply to them, but does, in fact, precisely and specially apply to a different order.

This being so, of course there did not exist in the later middle ages in England two kinds or classes of Benedictine monks, viz., "those who carried on the work of St. Augustine" and had cure of souls, and those who "had no cure of souls and never left their enclosure." Both classes appear to be unknown to history.

With the close of the middle ages and the destruction of the monasteries I close my comments on the passages of the discourse.

In view of the categorical statements made by Bishop Hedley what I have been saying may seem to you just incredible. You may ask me—"Is it possible, and how is it possible, that a man of Bishop Hedley's universally recognised ability and attainments can have made such a mistake in what is not a mere matter of detail, but (if you be right) a mistake that is fundamental and one that sets him as it were instinctively wrong throughout?"

I think you have a right to expect a reply to such a natural question, and a reply other than "I cannot tell." Though the matter is somewhat delicate I will venture to give one, only observing first that this lies outside the

object of my present letter, and what now follows is matter of opinion in interpretation of mental processes, and is written with the reserves which that implies.

The Bishop, if I mistake not, himself gives the key to the difficulty, and indicates not obscurely the causes of his consistent course of error in dealing with the history, in a remark serving to introduce the series of passages quoted above. It is this :—"every Catholic of this country, I had almost said every educated Englishman, knows that the English Benedictines are a very distinct, marked, and recognizable religious body—a body with characteristics and functions differing in many respects from those of the Benedictines of Italy, Germany, France or Spain." Starting from this statement he proceeds to give, historically, the cause and (if I may use the word) justification of such a fact.

I venture to think, on looking round at the Benedictines throughout the world as they exist to-day, that the Bishop finds a certain uniqueness in the English congregation which others fail to see ; and this is a view in which, if the case be considered in all its bearings, most competently informed outsiders, at the least, will, I think, concur. But this by the way. The only matter for concern here is that he himself (whether rightly or wrongly) is deeply impressed with a sense that what is called the English Benedictine congregation is differentiated from every other Benedictine body,¹ not because its members are English in nationality, but because its Benedictinism is something *sui generis*.

Now the "English Benedictine" has always prided himself on his ancestry ; that he does so still the Bishop's own discourse is speaking evidence. The idea of his

¹ I presume that "Italy, Germany, France and Spain" must of course not be taken literally, and to the exclusion of all Benedictines elsewhere.

"historical continuity" (if I may judge from what I have seen, heard and read) most justly lies very near his heart; and the identity of the English Benedictine body of to-day with that existing in England before the Reformation, he looks on as a special glory.

All this being so we have only to look to a parallel case¹ to see what may easily happen. Within the last few years we have heard much of the "historical continuity of the English Church." How is this made out? By the simple expedient of writing the history of the past, not (to use Bradshaw's terms) by studying the past intelligently and leaving the facts to tell their own story, but by so describing the past as to make it look as much like the present as possible; or, to put it shortly, by writing the present into the past.

And this, I should say, is just what Bishop Hedley (of course quite unconsciously) has done in the present case.

I do not mean to say, of course, that other causes have not been also at work. I have indicated some already. Here is another possible and fundamental one. Quite recently-instituted Benedictine congregations inspired by, caught up more or less in admiration of, the prevailing Benedictinism of the eleventh century, have given that out as the true and genuine form, the fine flower, of Benedictine monachism—a pretension which a sound and serious study of monastic history shows to be as unfounded as that which centres round the presumed special functions of English Benedictinism.

There is one point more to which I should like to call your attention; it is a very simple matter, but one that goes directly at the root of all "intelligent study" of

¹ I say a "parallel" case, not a case "on all fours."

Benedictine antiquity in England. I read in the discourse as follows :

“The English Benedictine congregation came into existence about sixty years after the death of St. Benedict.”

Now Bishop Hedley is too skilled a writer and too practical a man wittingly to use words with any other purpose than to convey the idea which the words, in their usual and current acceptation, imply for his ordinary reader. The words just quoted, implying that what is called “the English Benedictine congregation” began to exist about sixty years after the death of St. Benedict, thus really convey a false impression, whether we regard name or thing. The word “congregation” in the Rule of St. Benedict, at the time of St. Gregory and St. Augustine, and for many centuries afterwards, meant, in its monastic sense, nothing more than “the community” of a house ; and it is only in comparatively modern times that it has acquired the sense in which Bishop Hedley uses it here (that is, as a confederation, union, corporation, or what not). All that can be said is that a community, or communities, of Benedictines existed in England about sixty years after the death of St. Benedict and that the Benedictines have existed here ever since.

But as the sentence is worded it renews, curiously enough, an old error broached among the English Benedictines, but confuted and done away with some 270 years ago : broached by the industrious and inaccurate Father Maihew in his *Trophæa*, who thought to add to the glory of “ours” by ascribing the institution of the “English Benedictine congregation” to an antiquity so remote and a founder so glorious as St. Gregory the Great ; confuted with the shrewdness of the lawyer and the sense of the historical critic by Father Augustine Baker in the *Apostolatus*, who showed that the English congregation can only

owe its existence to the provisions of the fourth Lateran Council, and therefore can only date from some time after the year 1215.

What has been said hitherto has been mostly by way of criticism. Though it is necessary now and again thus to clear the ground of growths that should not occupy it, this is but a negative (and, as I feel, in itself, a poor) sort of work. What we want in this world *à la fin du compte* is to get at the positive; not what is not, but what is. Moreover, it may not be supposed that when a man like Bishop Hedley makes a presentment of the past history of the English Benedictines, such as that given in his discourse, he is possessed by a mere phantom of the imagination. The probability must be that a truth of some kind lies behind it all, whatever the mistakes in detail, or the general error running through the case *as it is put*. I will venture on an attempt to indicate that truth as it seems to me to lie in the facts, "if we let them tell their own story."

Tosti has hit the mark in saying (p. 209) that it was in England that Benedictinism acquired "blood and nerve." When deduction is made of untenable legend,¹ Benedictinism can hardly be said to have had demonstrable existence, or certainly power and influence, in Gaul in the sixth century. England was the theatre on which the chance first offered of displaying the potentialities of the Rule in countries and conditions (as foreseen by its author) different from those in which it was drawn up. It was here, in this island, that its largeness of spirit, its power of adaptation to circumstances, was first grasped, realised and shown forth in act. As we look at the work and influence of the English Benedictines of the first two centuries (in which term I include our Apostles from

¹ And here it will go hard with the mission of St. Maurus and the glories of Glanfeuil.

Rome), it can hardly be denied that they have powerfully helped, and in a way of their own, to make the Benedictine form of monachism the great factor it has been in the religious history of Western Europe. While this is so it is likely enough, as a correlative, that Benedictinism in England, working as it did in a race of such strong and definite characteristics as the Anglo-Saxon, should come to bear definite marks of its own. But we must not make a mistake as to what these are, and our correctness in this matter will depend upon the justness of our apprehension of the facts, in their length and breadth, which the story reveals to us. The course of that long history (which is one from the beginning till now) has shown, as I think must appear to those who endeavour to read it with an unprejudiced eye, the striking and abiding characteristic of the Black Monks of England to have been this—that whilst they were endowed with a strong spirit of initiative, successive generations allowed themselves above all to be guided by the varying needs, tone, temper of the ages in which they found themselves, and accordingly adapted their methods to their own times and circumstances, neither cramped by exclusive theories, nor hampered by exclusive systems, whether such be found in the rigour of Irish asceticism, the formalities and centralisation of Cluny, the congregational absorption of the Cassinese, the parochial system of the old Canons Regular, or finally a purism which bans extra-claustral work altogether.

Montalembert, by eliminating the clergy from the general picture which he draws of the early English Church, has manifestly destroyed its true perspective and proportion. Had he taken this factor duly into account, the actual amount of space devoted to the monks in his history of the conversion of England would hardly have been diminished by a page, for a reason already indicated,

namely, that the prominent men, the leaders, those of whom there is a story to tell, were almost exclusively monks. This holds good to a very considerable extent of the eighth century also. Of the clergy it must be said that their names have not here won fame, though perhaps their names are not for that less surely written in the Book of Life. But the original documents do reveal their existence, and in numbers, not merely scattered over the country as individual pastors, but leading also in their minsters, *monasteria*, and perhaps even in their minsterlets, *monasteriola*, that common life which St. Gregory had desired to see instituted among them and which has led many persons, either in haste or from ignorance, or from some other cause, to take them for monks. And it is forgetfulness of this fact, that the common life of the clergy was an established institute in England long before Chrodegang, that is the root of mistakes so often made in dealing with the early English church.

But, on the other hand, because it would not be possible to find in original documents sure and certain examples of monk parish priests in the eighth century, or because these records fail in definiteness or precision, it would be, it seems to me, unreasonable to be doubting and disputing, on the ground of some imagined theoretical exigency, as to the continuance of pastoral work by the Benedictines in England after the lapse of the century Montalembert speaks of. Such continuance in pastoral labour, in some cases at least, seems to be only a reasonable assumption, just as the monks of some other monasteries, as, for instance, Wearmouth or Jarrow, seem not to have been engaged in the pastoral care at all.

A rational and sensible mode of treatment of our sources of knowledge is the treatment that seems demanded by the generally practical and common-sense character, and

local freedom of action, shown by English Benedictinism of the period.

The Bishop passes lightly over the second great period of his history, the monastic revival of the tenth and early eleventh centuries. I touch on it here because I think that prejudices and prepossessions have been allowed in some measure to obscure the realities of things. Writers have dwelt invidiously on the substitution of monks for clergy at Winchester, or Oswald's institution of them at Worcester; or again on Dunstan's presumed want of sympathy with the general movement; but the particular "note" of that revival is the recognition of the needs of the times. The monks, it is true, first attended to themselves; but from the very quality of the men whom they attracted they could not help coming to the front. They did not rest here, nor in the mere promotion of their own monastic interests. The ultimate aim, when monks were supreme in the episcopate and the state, was to raise the status of the secular clergy by the renewal of their life; to help them to help themselves.¹ To see this it is enough to read with care and intelligence the monuments of legislation, ecclesiastical and civil, of the tenth century especially. Thus, too, Ælfric, the monk, who writes sermons, and with the utmost care, for the use of the humble parish priest, paves the way for Wulfstan the clergyman; the monastic cathedrals, by the old rule that example is better than precept, lead the cathedral clergy by-and-by, as at Hereford, Wells or Exeter, to acquiesce in the common life; and the translation into English of

¹ Some perception of this truth, coupled perhaps with a difficulty in getting rid of the idea of monkish self-seeking, has led Bishop Stubbs to represent St. Dunstan as lukewarm in the monastic sense; but then I think that in his appreciations in general, whether of this or of a later age, Bishop Stubbs fails in realization of the full value and action of more purely religious forces and ideas.

the Rule of St. Benedict for monks is a prelude to the translation into English of the Rule of St. Chrodegang for clerks. When the history of this period comes to be written as it lies in the facts, as it really was, this care of the monastic leaders for the welfare of the clergy, that is, of the Church herself, will appear here in England (as doubtless at this time not in England alone) to their highest credit.

There remains the third period, that of the "ages of faith." In those days there was a standing joke (of a sort) against the English, summed up in the epithet *Angli caudati*. What I should like to say, following Bishop Hedley, on this third period is a little long, and as this letter is already long enough to exhaust all your patience, I will relegate my remarks, by way of an English *cauda*, to a second part.

And now I remain,

Yours most truly,

EDMUND BISHOP.

PART II.

THE ENGLISH BENEDICTINE CONGREGATION IN THE
LATER MIDDLE AGES.

December 10, 1897.

. . . . We have seen the terms in which Bishop Hedley speaks of the English Benedictines from the twelfth to the sixteenth century: "nothing greater, finer, or more powerful has ever been known in any age of the Church's history outside the work of the Holy See and the Episcopate." There has lately appeared, however, from the pen of Dom Ursmer Berlière, in the pages of the Maredsous *Revue Bénédictine*, a sketch which presents a different picture. I may not apply in this case the old wise saw "*Fas est ab hoste doceri*"; but no exception can be taken to a plea to try for a moment "to see ourselves as others see us." It is always possible, if necessary, to reckon up the account with them afterwards; I make no scruple, therefore, to give Dom Berlière's description in full below.

It may not be superfluous to explain, first of all, that Dom Berlière is the author of two volumes, or *fasciculi*, of a *Monasticon Belge*, which give evidence that he is a laborious and industrious searcher into archives, and that he is accustomed to deal with original sources. He is also a constant contributor to the above-named "Benedictine Review" in the shape of interesting (and, I think, really instructive) articles on the later history of the Benedictines of the Low Countries, and of a useful periodical survey of

recent publications relating to the history of the Benedictines at large. But here I must add that, in regard to matters that come within the scope of my own knowledge, I not so uncommonly find statements and appreciations which, on the score of both accuracy and justness, are of a nature to destroy confidence, and often raise grave doubts in my mind as to the value of other statements or appreciations in matters which, from imperfectness of knowledge, I am not in a position so well to control.

But to our immediate point. This is the way in which Dom Berlière sums up the English Benedictines of the later middle ages in the "Bulletin d'histoire Bénédictine," appearing in the number of the *Revue Bénédictine* for July, 1897 (pp. 316-317):

"The Benedictine Order had then (in the thirteenth century) reached, in England, the height of its power; but it was sinking under the weight of its past greatness, and too often found itself reduced to be a mere wheel in the machinery of the feudal world (*un rouage du monde féodal*).

"As a social institution it still occupied an important and beneficent position in the midst of the nation which it had once converted, and the education of which it had directed for centuries. But religious and intellectual influence passed out of its hands. Feudalism fashioned for it a vesture brilliant indeed, but too heavy for it to escape from; and, turned in upon itself, it created for itself out of a local life isolated, mechanical in its conservative exclusivism, an ideal and an aim.

"It is no longer in its monasteries that bishops are sought; it is no longer in its bosom, a few annalists excepted, that studious men are to be found. Aristocratic corporations, the heads of which had a seat in the estates of the realm, the monasteries live 'd'une vie honnête'; a life great, if you please, by attachment to the traditions of the past, by their beneficent action on the populations that live under the crosier; a life great by the benefits flowing from a charity that never dried up; but a life which is no longer more than the majestic shadow of that of the centuries before the twelfth, of the centuries when activity irresistibly found for itself a vent without, and translated itself into action on the nation at large and on the Church.

"The Church, it is true, spoke of reform; in the Order it was a question of the maintenance of rights acquired and of traditions, and

of adaptation to circumstances. General Chapters were regularly held ; the universities were frequented ; a very respectable level was maintained ; but we might 'en partie' apply to this epoch what an Anglican bishop has said of the Established Church of the present day, that they were dying of 'respectabilité.'

"But I will be carefully on my guard against generalising too much and darkening the picture to excess. . . . I am inclined to believe that the General Chapters did produce happy results ; and I hope that the history of these assemblies, if it come to be written, will contribute to throw light on the monastic history of the thirteenth to the sixteenth century, too little known, too little explored.

"However that may be, we must always see the ideal of the Benedictine life in the union of prayer and labour, but labour serious, fruitful, fecund. Quietism in all its forms is an aberration."

When I first read this passage the last clause came upon me with the freshness of a surprise. It is doubtless a safe truism, but what it had to do with what precedes was a puzzle. Turn the matter which way a man will, if he really knows anything of these subjects—English monachism, *saec.* xiii.-xvi., or "quietism"—he will fail to be able to conceive how the English Benedictines of that time manifested any tendency towards what is called "quietism" in any shape or form. But it occurred to me that Father Augustine Baker was accused, though not convicted, of quietism by those who did not like him.

Then I recalled a passage just above which had struck me in the reading as odd, and as not very classical French either, representing the English monks of those ages as dying "de respectabilité." And it came to me to remember having heard the same observation made of the English Benedictine congregation of the present day. A light began to dawn upon me and in this light I read the whole over again, with the result that other passages, which I had not hitherto noticed and need not here specify, came out with a new meaning as (so to speak) the "points" of this meditation. And so it appeared to me that I might, not altogether without injustice, adapt in regard to himself the

writer's own words on poor Matthew Paris : " il écrit beaucoup, un peu vite, et trahit ainsi des pensées intimes." For we have not here a case of one of those just historical deductions which, carefully made on a full and accurate survey of a range of complex and sometimes almost trivial facts, are not merely legitimate, but are in themselves the very " use " of history, the very instruction itself for which all these things are written. But the statements put forth as facts by Dom Berlière are derived from the substance of his thesis, instead of the thesis being derived from the facts.

Let us take his statements one by one, and see what is their value.

" Ce n'est plus dans ses monastères [*i.e.*, of the Benedictines] que l'on va chercher les évêques."—Taking facts and figures for my guide I thought that the number of Benedictine bishops in England from the year 1200 to (say) 1530 exceeded, not that of the bishops taken from the ranks of any other religious order, but that of the bishops taken from the ranks of all the other religious orders put together.

" Ce n'est plus dans son sein, à part quelques annalistes, que l'on trouve les hommes d'étude."—It is difficult to meet such a statement without writing a treatise, and to adduce single examples is to appear to make a pick in order to vamp up a case. But I will prefer to lay myself open to such reproach rather than imitate Dom Berlière's categorical generalities. I turn to the single monastery of St. Alban's, and at a " low level " time ; Nicholas Radcliff's monstrous volume (written before Netter's great work) and Whethamstede's *Granarium* are hardly books that will now ever appear in print, any more than John of Tynemouth's *Sanctilogium* ; but no one can say that in a monastery where such books were written studies were

not pursued, but rather, it is to be concluded, were held in honour. Or in another range of work, is there no Lydgate at Bury? Does, or does not, England owe the revival of Greek studies in the fifteenth century to the Benedictines?

“On fréquenta les universités, on maintint un niveau très respectable.”—When we are able to come accurately to the facts by means of extant registers, we can tell *how* the English Benedictines “frequented the universities,” and what precisely was this “respectable level.” It is found, taking facts and figures again as our guide, that the number of Benedictines taking degrees at the University of Oxford exceeds the sum total of the members of all the other religious orders taking degrees put together. It must not be supposed that this was because the Benedictine monks equalled or outnumbered the members of the other orders; on the contrary, they were about a fourth of the whole number. It may be as well also to add that at Oxford no one could proceed to a degree in Theology or Canon Law who had not taken his degree in Humanities. Besides, to graduate in either faculty was then a much longer affair than the obtaining of Doctorates at present.

“On tint régulièrement des chapitres généraux.”—This statement may perhaps, in the mind of Dom Berlière, carry with it all that it implies. But even he himself, if I may judge from the general tenor of his remarks, as I am sure must be the case with most of his readers, has hardly realised, as he certainly has not expressed, its full import. For readier apprehension of what I have to say later I therefore dwell a little more at length on the subject. It means that visitations were regularly held, the country being divided into some eight districts for that purpose and visitors being deputed at every chapter; that the reports of the visitors were made in public at the subsequent chapter in an assembly of some 150 or 200 people, not

merely a select body of great abbots *in camerâ* ; any serious case affecting even a single individual being distinctly specified by the name of the house in public, but reserved to be detailed in private to the presidents for their personal action thereon. Every case of absence from these chapters (held every three or four years) was strictly enquired into, and proctors had to appear personally and depose as to the cause of absence on oath. It is not necessary to be a monk, it is enough to be a layman, to know the value of a constant supervision, enquiry and over-hauling for keeping matters straight; and any person with practice of the working of affairs can well enough appreciate the probable, nay certain, results of such a system so long as it is maintained in vigour, and the probable, nay certain, consequences, whether among monks or other folk, of the failure to adopt such obvious methods or the failure to maintain them regularly if once adopted. In addition, it must ever be to the honour and credit of the English Benedictines of those days that, besides the visitors of their own order, they subjected themselves to the further check which is involved in the continuance of episcopal, alongside of the capitular, visitations. I say "subjected themselves," for in England these monks formed a very powerful and much respected corporation ; and if they had chosen to apply to the King and to the Pope to free them from this supervision and (as some may feel) badge of inferiority, there can be no reasonable doubt they would have obtained the exemption asked for.

"L'Eglise, il est vrai parla de réforme ; dans l'ordre il fut question du maintien des droits acquis et des traditions, et d'appropriation aux circonstances." Here again it is difficult to deal concisely with a writer so peremptory in his own concise generalities and yet so imperfectly acquainted with facts. The English Benedictines of the

fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries did not wait for the Church to "talk of reform." Years before the reforming councils of the fifteenth century, as early as the year 1385, the English monks, acting in the person of Cardinal Adam Easton, had begun to move in this matter. Deaths, events at home and in the Curia, the ticklishness of the new reign of Henry IV., who had good reason for thinking some of the principal monasteries as anything but favourable to the Lancastrian cause and might look with reasonable suspicion on *molimina novarum rerum* among them, explain why and how the matter for the time fell through.¹ But under his son the time came and the work was done. To pass on to a later period. Long before Trent and its "talk of reform," the English monks once more reviewed their position in order to adapt themselves to the circumstances of the new time. I like to think of that scene in the Chapter House of Westminster when this great meeting was inaugurated in the presence of two Cardinals, Wolsey and Campeggio. A prelate full of zeal for good order and church discipline spoke to the assembly in words, warm, frank and free, as though he knew he spoke to men who were ready hearers, who did not shrink from home thrusts, and who could listen with a wish to profit even by a preacher's well-meant exaggerations. By this I do not mean to imply that he had anything very grave or grievous to say. Not at all. I have read also the bishop's affectionate dedication to one of the abbats then present which gives us a glimpse of the sort of monks that then dwelt in our English cloisters. At a subsequent chapter, as they had done in earlier centuries, the Benedictines of England demurred to

¹ It may be remembered that Merks, Bishop of Carlisle, whose case has been, from a constitutional point of view, so noteworthy, was a Benedictine.

accepting at Wolsey's hands the imposition of austerities which were not fit for this country, and which being tried had only had the effect, as they pointed out to him by present examples, of emptying convents and repelling vocations; at the same time they declared themselves ready to accept the rest of Wolsey's proposals as being observances that ought to characterise good monks. But there was no noise about all this, no clatter, no beating of the tom-tom of "Reform."

Some quite recent Protestant English writers have called attention with surprise to the number of able Benedictines who came to the fore and were conspicuous as men of learning just after this time, and to the evident high level of studies maintained among them. They, like our foreign friend Dom Berlière (though they show, I think, a spirit more equitable, not to say benign, than that censor), knew nothing of these movements among the Benedictines, but they recognised the results as facts, and did not attempt, in default of knowledge, to supply the void in their own minds by deductions from their own theories.¹

¹ Since penning the above it has struck me that the attempts to impose a "reform" on the English Benedictines in the thirteenth century ought to be referred to. I drew up a short history of them in 1884 from printed and manuscript sources. They proceeded (always on the same line) in succession (1) from some busy Cistercians apparently, (2) from the Legate Otto, (3) from Archbishop Boniface of Savoy, (4) from the Legate Ottobono. The cardinal article, and the only one that met with opposition or was not apparently already in common observance here, was abstinence from flesh meat. The upshot of the business was a shower of dispensations on this head, granted for money. It also resulted, at least for a time, in the equivalent of an expedient which must be edifying to some persons, or the system could never have been favoured in so many countries and orders, viz., a "*réfectoire pour le gras*," and another for "*meagre*." But in England this practice of double eating places was abandoned not long after. This is the sum of the long business; but even this little betrays the moral of the process.

It is not for lack of material for correction that I do not pursue Dom Berlière's particular statements further. I hasten to get to the root of the matter, and the source of his ready misapprehensions.

He seems to me to be not reasonable in his general point of view or in the ground work of his thoughts. Whatever the power of adaptability to circumstances in the Benedictine Rule, there is nothing in the Order of St. Benedict, or, indeed, in any other religious order, which can exempt it from the fate of every creation of man, even of a saint. The thirteenth century saw the advent of a new order of things, a new world, which Benedictines, more powerfully, perhaps, than any other single factor, had helped to create. But it was a world which, from their very spirit and nature, they were not fit to deal with and to mould as they had dealt with and moulded that which had gone before. With the new needs of the Church came new forces, directly sprung out of, fashioned and conditioned by, the very life and circumstances of the new time. As well reproach the Benedictines of England of those days that they did not occupy the same position as that which had been held by their forerunners "*antérieurs au douzième siècle*," as it would be to reproach the Dominicans and Franciscans for having found themselves in the second half of the sixteenth century under the necessity of giving place to the Society of Jesus, as the dominant religious and educational factor of that time, or to expect of the Jesuits that they should for ever and aye occupy the position they held in the seventeenth century. The course of things in this world, as Divine Providence has ruled them, is much more wholesome though less pleasing to our self-love. The old saying of the vulgar comes true for religious orders as for the rest of the world—"every dog has his

day." The fastidious may prefer to take the poet's word for it in those lines that come upon us, as we read of that long parting, full of sadness and of hope :

"The old order changeth giving place to new,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world."

To expect one good custom, "our" custom, ever to prevail, to expect that "we" and "ours" are to be always on the crest of the wave, can be the judgment only of one who fails to appreciate things in this world, nay, in his own lesser "world," as they are and as God has ruled that they should be; and therefore it is at its root a perverted judgment.

It does not follow, however, because a body of men may happen no longer to be the chief "religious and intellectual influence" of the day, that they can therefore no longer perform a most useful function in the world, or be still not merely an important but even an indispensable element in the general economy of things in Church and State. In forming a judgment of the English Benedictines of the thirteenth to the sixteenth century, we have to see how the new conditions necessarily affected their position and action, and then consider how, under the new circumstances, they played their part.

First, to point briefly to certain special difficulties for them in the new era. One main feature of the situation seems perfectly clear, though I do not stop to develop the explanation here, especially as Dom Berlière evidently perceives it, viz., that feudalism was not congenial to the Benedictine Order, and that a society dominated by the feudal spirit is unfavourable to its prosperity. Looking to the facts we might (but for one exception) use a stronger word and say that feudalism was "fatal" to it. Again, in the thirteenth century, with the increasing and improving cultivation of their ancient estates, the general

social recovery, the accumulation of new benefactions in the shape of spiritual benefices and temporal goods, the great English Benedictine houses now first entered into the full and perilous burden of their superabounding wealth. At the same time, by the common course of things in this shifting world, the new religious orders were naturally and inevitably drawing to themselves the highest and most active religious aspirations of the day, for they came into existence in order to incorporate them. Moreover, it is not to be forgotten that the English clergy, too, were at this period recovering from the unhappy religious eclipse from which they had suffered the century before. Nor was it any compensation that many of the abbats now were magnates both in Church and State, a position of things which might easily bring about a cleft between them and the communities¹ they had been elected to rule, and which was certainly, however flattering to human vanity, a real danger alike to superiors and subjects.

Here are some of the difficulties they had to encounter. In these circumstances how did the men comport themselves, and what was the outcome? Before we are in a position to answer the question quite *en connaissance de cause*, we must look around a little and not confine our attention to England. The unfavourable conditions that have been enumerated existed in the main elsewhere. How fared the Benedictines of other countries, of France or Burgundy, Italy or Germany, at least in their respective "provinces"? A general chapter may be held here or there, but these are sparse and few, with neither heart nor courage, *suite*, system, or perseverance. Here or there a monastery may fortune to pass more or less unscathed.

¹ "Corps aristocratiques" says Dom Berlière, in his usual rough and ready style of misapprehension.

As time goes on, lapse, ruin, in spirituals and temporals, becomes more and more a feature, until it may be said to be a dominant one. *Commendam* spreads like a leprosy, and churchmen and nobles vie with each other in plundering the monastic heritage. The case can be described in no fitter words than those of the psalmist: *Ut quid destruxisti maceriam vineæ tuæ et vindemiant eam omnes qui prætergrediuntur viam? Exterminavit eam aper de sylva, et singularis ferus deprædatus est eam.* To adopt the figurative language used by Dom Berlière, the black monks outside England were certainly not enveloped by feudalism in "a brilliant vesture"; still less did they escape investiture at all; but under the weight of the vesture, such as it was, with which feudalism enveloped them, they fell, brought low by it, even to the ground. I do not think that, taking a general survey, this is an exaggeration.

In England, on the contrary, *commendam* has utterly no history at all; it is unknown. In place of it we find a history of general chapters and visitations, regular and systematic, capitular and episcopal, embracing the whole country and every house. Such a picture as Busch draws in his *Liber de reformatione monasteriorum* is to us impossible to conceive in this country. Dom Berlière's "replié sur lui même," and his "conservatisme exclusif," is, taken at the best, so much verbiage. In his sneer about "dying of *respectabilité*," he has, however, struck upon an idea which is true if put into English and put exactly the contrary way about. "On mourait de *respectabilité*," says he. So far from "dying of *respectabilité*" it was of their "respectability" (I use here the English word in its sound English sense and not in that low and corrupt sense in which alone, characteristically enough of these days, the neologism of "*respectabilité*" has been admitted into the French tongue), it was of their respectability—"the qualities which deserve

or command respect"—that they *lived*, and lived through covetous generations in a position of abounding wealth, of dignity, and of honour to the end.

Because the religious and educational current was setting in other channels, they did not cry aloud or cast about for an "ideal." Like thorough-paced English folk, as they were, they set themselves to make the most and best of the things they found at their hands, and to perform the plain duties their circumstances dictated. They did not allow time to lapse in easy somnolence, or evil to become inveterate and past cure; they made no great renunciation, nor did they seek to make a new start on then fashionable models, or narrow themselves into select "reformed" circles or coteries. Their endeavours at this time, but not at this time alone, were characterised, to use Tosti's words (Canon Woods' translation, p. 209), "by that moderation in proposal and perseverance in design" of which we may trust and hope our race has not yet lost the secret. The result is a clear and patent fact on the face of our history, and there is no gainsaying it. The Benedictine monks of England, as a body, continued to command, in very different and less favourable circumstances, that respect of high and low which their predecessors had earned in the ages before. That my Lord Prior swept by to-day with a train of twenty or five and twenty horsemen, seemed to people in those days no more consonant with the simplicity of monachism, as such, than it would appear to us now; nor was the defection overlooked merely because to-morrow the same Lord Prior might be sitting in a manor court, seeing to it personally that generosity accompanied justice in the dealings with his tenants and dependents; but because men recognised on the one hand that this worldly state, this secular parade, was an inevitable incident of a situation already created

as a part of the existing social system, whilst on the other they saw also that, whatever might be here or there the failing of an individual, these men did not make the temporal advantages that had accrued to them an excuse for sliding into neglect of their primary duties, but made real, serious, and continuous efforts to correspond to those duties of the religious life to which they were vowed.

What English Benedictines as a body did for three centuries and more, the Benedictines of other states, realms or provinces might have done too, but they did it not. And they fell, house by house, only too often the prey of the spoiler, or the victims of their own negligence and want of public spirit. If I, in my turn, may use figurative language, I should say that in these later middle ages the Benedictines had to pass through dangerous straits, and that in these straits the black monks of every country but one foundered. The black monks of England, and they alone, by adopting due precautions, passed safely through the dangerous and treacherous shallows. And it may thus be said with all the verity of sober truth that they are for this time the credit and honour, or (if we choose to look at the matter in another way) the reproach and the shame, of the Benedictine Order in the later middle ages.

This is a conclusion that will hold in spite of this matter of detail or of that, in spite of this failure or of that, or of the recovery of this unknown document or the other. Whatever the progress of historical investigation, it is a broad fact that will stand firm and irreversible, and it will not be affected by sneers, or laments, or detractions.

We may now revert to Bishop Hedley's words quoted at the beginning of this second part of my letter, and compare them with Dom Berlière's description of the life of the English Benedictines, saec. xiii.-xvi., as only

“l'ombre majestueuse de celle des siècles antérieurs au douzième.” If I must choose between the two, I feel that consistently with the facts I must follow Bishop Hedley; but I should be disposed to put the matter in another way. Thus. After bearing in mind all that is involved in “Reichsunmittelbarkeit” and the “Prälatenbank,” it appears to me that the position of the English Benedictines in the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries, realises more nearly than any other state of things in the past those dreams of ambitious splendour that lie behind the seventh element of Abbat Maurus Wolter's *Elementa*; though, with the hold of our Englishmen on the traditions of a Benedictine past, not in the hierarchical (and, so far, secularizing) form developed in that programme. But then that programme is based upon a historical foundation demonstrably false.

Great, however, and imposing as was this creation of the later English middle ages, I quite think with Dom Berlière that for the present day happier, more wholesome, and saner inspirations may be derived from the Benedictines of earlier and simpler days “antérieurs au douzième siècle,” when as yet the monks were undistinguished by so much pomp, secular and ecclesiastical; and when as yet the satirists had not begun, provoked by exhibitions of vain-gloriousness, to make monkhood the subject of their biting verse. . . .

Yours most truly,

E. B.





